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INL Small Business Program helps Idaho business enhance market position

By Misty Benjamin, *INL Communications & Governmental Affairs*

Although Idaho National Laboratory is both a business partner and an employer, a research collaborator and a policy advisor, few realize it can also serve as a small business mentor.

"The small business program is successful when we help a business develop and implement a plan to invest, grow, and advance its interests while supporting the needs of the lab," said Dana Storms, former INL Small Business Program manager. "By moving into new areas or advancing existing capabilities, small businesses may gain a strategic market advantage."

The U.S. Department of Energy recently recognized INL as the 2009 Mentor of the Year for its commitment to mentoring small businesses. The DOE Mentor of the Year program specifically recognized INL's Mentor-Protégé Program for enhancing the capabilities of Portage, a small, "disadvantaged" business.

INL entered into a mentor-protégé agreement in 2006 with Portage, which is defined as a disadvantaged business because it is majority owned by someone in a "historically subjected" group such as women or ethnic minorities. The local business wanted to transform itself to better match the lab's long-term mission. The result was the formation of a detailed plan and support team to help Portage diversify its capabilities to provide task-based engineering and environmental services to the lab.

"Our Mentor-Protégé Agreement with Portage demonstrates how coaching and mentoring can help focus and grow a small business," INL Mentor-Protégé Program's Marsha Burke said. "The success of the mentor-protégé agreement is a direct result of the time invested by INL employees and their management to help Portage transform its business base through this partnership."



From top left: Dana Storms, Harry Fugate, Marsha Burke, Wray Landon, Ann Riedesel and Stacey Francis; Greg Wray and Steve Abbott are kneeling.



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The program depends on willing participants within the lab and the protégé company spending its time, energy and creativity to leverage the protégé's strengths and meet both organizations' goals.

As a result of INL's mentoring efforts, Portage has become a capable and qualified partner for the laboratory. In 2009, Portage was awarded a contract to oversee INL's Chemical Management program. Through training, initiative and commitment, INL and Portage employees worked together to ensure that the company's qualifications and capabilities were sufficiently developed to undertake the work while managing risks associated with the transition.

"Through INL's mentoring, Portage has been able to expand its capabilities to support the new nuclear missions at the laboratory while still supporting the lab through our traditional areas of engineering and environmental services," said Kerry Martin, Portage's Mentor-Protégé Project manager. "INL has been instrumental to our growth into new business areas and helping solidify Portage's business base."

According to Burke, Portage has exceeded INL's expectations and added significant value to the services it provides the lab. Portage also completed all mentor-protégé-related projects on or ahead of schedule, on or below budget, with no lost-time accidents or safety issues.

"Mentoring is a fundamental component of INL's program to target, shape and retain small businesses," said Stacey Francis, INL's Small Business Program manager. "We benefit from these mentoring agreements as they help us fulfill our mission."

INL also has a mentoring agreement with International Management Services, which is performing digitization services for the INL Technical Library.

